Listing Of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) A hot-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing packaged, composite, cohesive food portions consisting of two or more different food items wrapped in a flexible film, comprising the steps of:

simultaneously and separately pumping each of the two or more food items to an extrusion location;

simultaneously and separately extruding each of the food items and longitudinally enclosing the food items in a tubular web of the film;

combining the food items into a predetermined food portion using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, wherein the combined food items within the composite food portion comprise gels that are in physical contact with each other yet retain their individual product identity; and

sealing the food portion within the flexible film, wherein the food portion maintains its individual product identity, and is cohesive and manually removeable from the film.

2. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the water activity of at least one of the food items is modified in a predetermined manner by the addition of sugar.

3. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food portions comprise food slices which are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the food slice from the sealed wrapper while retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slice.

4. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food portions are hermetically sealed within their wrappers.

5. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food portions comprise slices and the food items comprise nut butter and jelly.

6. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the jelly comprises first and second thickeners, the first thickener causing the jelly to have a viscosity of less than about 5,000 centipoise during its extrusion, and the second thickener causing the jelly to have a viscosity of greater than about 100,000 centipoise following extrusion of the jelly and after setting of the second thickener.

7. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the water activity of the jelly is reduced by the addition of sugar.

8. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the water activity of the nut butter is increased by the addition of sugar.

9. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein a hard fat is added to the nut butter.

10. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 50 - 90% peanut butter; 1 - 40% peanut flour; 0.5 - 5% stabilizer; 0 - 10% sucrose; and 0 - 2% salt.

11. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 40 - 85% peanut butter; 0-10% peanut flour; 0-10% maltodextrin; 0-40% corn syrup; 0.5-5.0% stabilizer; 0.5-4.0% emulsifier; 0.1-3.0% salt; 0-35% fructose; 0-20% dextrose; and 0-40% water.

12. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 5 - 20% fruit juice; 0.5- 5 % high methoxyl pectin; 0.5- 5% low methoxyl pectin; 0.1 - 3% acidulants; and 0 - 2.5% vegetable oil.

13. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 5 - 20% fruit juice; 20-40% corn syrup; 15-35% fructose; 5-20% dextrose; 0.25-4.0% konjac flour; 0.05-2.0% carrageenan; 0.5-4.0% high methoxyl pectin; 0.1-3.0% citric acid; and 0-2.5% vegetable oil.

14. (Previously Presented) A hot-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing a packaged, composite food portion consisting of two or more different

food items wrapped in a flexible film, comprising the steps of:

simultaneously and separately pumping each of the two or more food items to an extrusion location, simultaneously and separately extruding each of the food items and combining them into a food portion wherein the combined food items within the food portion retain their individual product identity, and longitudinally wrapping the food portion in a tubular web of the film;

forming the tubular web into a slice-shaped food portion using one or more flattening devices;

briefly maintaining separation of the different food items following extrusion and prior to the formation of the web into a slice-shaped, composite, gelled food portion using one or more divider plates; and

enclosing and sealing the food portion comprising the food items which are in physical contact with each other within the flexible film, wherein the food portion[s] comprises slices and two or more generally planar-shaped extrusion nozzles are used to provide a laminate food slice; and wherein the composite food slices maintain their individual product identity and are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the food slice from the wrapper while substantially retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slice.

15 (canceled)

16. (previously presented) The process of Claim 14, wherein the one or more divider plates are coated with a substance having a low coefficient of friction.

17 (original) The process of Claim 16, wherein the one or more divider plates are coated with Teflon®.

18. (previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food portions comprise food slices which are continuously sealed and wrapped at a rate in excess of 300 slices/minute at a single-lane machine.

19. (original) The process of Claim 18, wherein the food slices are continuously

sealed and wrapped at a rate in excess of 700 slices/minute.

20. (original) The process of Claim 18, wherein the food slices are continuously sealed and wrapped at a rate in excess of 1,000 slices/minute.

21. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein sensing mechanisms are employed to maintain or regulate weights of each of the two or more food items.

22. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the amounts of each of the two or more food items within a food portion are maintained within predetermined ratios.

23. (previously presented) The process of Claim 21, wherein the sensing mechanisms comprise one or more of the following: mass flow meters, transducers and level sensors.

24. (original) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of heating one or more of the food items into a soft, molten mass prior to their extrusion.

25. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food items are oriented in an alternating, generally stripe-shaped pattern within the food portions.

26. (original) The process of Claim 1, further comprising a plurality of adjacent extrusion nozzles.

27. (original) The process of Claim 1, further comprising two or more concentric extrusion tubes for extruding the food items in a variegated format.

28. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the wrapped food portion has a refrigerated shelf life of greater than about six months.

29. (original) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of cooling the food portions following extrusion.

30. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the hardness of the nut butter within the finished food slice is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm^2 at 43EF.

31. (original) The process of Claim 5, wherein the hardness of the jelly within the finished food slice is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm^2 at 43EF.

32. (original) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of separately mixing

ingredients for each of one or more of the food items prior to the pumping step.

33. (original) The process of Claim 10, wherein the nut component of the nut butter is created by combining nut flour with an edible oil.

34. (original) The process of Claim 6, wherein the first and second thickeners each comprise gels.

35 (canceled)

36. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the at least one of the food items completely surrounds another of the food items within the wrapped food portion.

37. (original) The process of Claim 1, wherein the food portion is consumable immediately following extrusion.

38. (currently amended) A fluid-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing and packaging composite food portions consisting of two or more different food items wrapped in a flexible film, comprising the steps of:

heating at least one of the two or more food items to a soft, molten mass while maintaining at least one of the two food items in a liquid state;

separately pumping each of the two or more food items to an extrusion location;

extruding each of the food items and combining them into a predetermined, composite, gelled food portion using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, wherein the different food items are in physical contact with each other yet maintain their individual product identity ~~and organoleptic attributes~~; and

enclosing the food portions within the flexible film and hermetically sealing each food portion within a hermetically sealed package of the flexible film having hermetic longitudinal seals and a hermetic cross-seal, wherein the food portions are cohesive and manually removeable from the film.

39 (canceled)

40. (Currently Amended) A process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing and packaging conformed food slices consisting of nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, comprising the steps of:

heating and mixing the nut butter and jelly into a liquified mixture;

separately delivering each of the liquified nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;

coextruding the nut butter and jelly so that each is combined into a predetermined, composite food portion in which the nut butter and jelly are in physical contact with each other, using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, while permitting the nut butter and jelly within the food portion to maintain its individual product identity ~~and organoleptic attributes~~;

adding sugar syrup to the nut butter prior to the extruding step;

converting each food portion into a generally slice-shape, wherein the food slices are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the food slice from the wrapper while substantially retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slice; and

wrapping the coextruded food slices within the flexible film and sealing each food slice within the wrapper, wherein the food portions are cohesive and manually removeable from the film.

41.-42. (canceled)

43. (original) The process of Claim 40, wherein the food slices are hermetically sealed within their wrappers.

44. (withdrawn) A food slice wrapped in a flexible film, comprising:

nut butter and jelly whose product identity and organoleptic attributes are each individually maintained within the slice;

the food slice being sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal from the

film while substantially retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slice;

wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 40-85% peanut butter; 0-40% peanut flour; 0.5-5.0% stabilizer; 0-10% sucrose; 0-3.0% salt; 0-10% maltodextrin; 0-40% high fructose corn syrup; 0-35% fructose; 0-20% dextrose; and 0-40% water.

45. (withdrawn) A food slice wrapped in a flexible film, comprising:

nut butter and jelly whose product identity and organoleptic attributes are each individually maintained within the slice;

the food slice being sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal from the film while substantially retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slice;

wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 40-55% sucrose; 5- 20% fruit juice; 1-5% high methoxyl pectin; 1 - 5% low methoxyl pectin; 0.1-3% citric acid; 0-2.5% vegetable oil; 0-40% high fructose corn syrup; 13-35% fructose; 5-20% dextrose; 0.25-4% konjac flour; and 0.05-2% carrageenan.

46. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 45, wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 20-40% high fructose corn syrup.

47. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 0-40% high fructose corn syrup and the jelly comprises, by weight, about 20-40% high fructose corn syrup.

48. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the water activity of one or both of the nut butter and jelly is modified in a predetermined manner.

49. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the differential water activity of the nut butter and jelly within the wrapped food slice is less than about 0.5.

50. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the differential water activity of the nut butter and jelly within the wrapped food slice is less than about 0.2.

51. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein sugar is used to increase the water activity of the nut butter to a predetermined level or to decrease the water activity of

the jelly to a predetermined level.

52. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the food slice is hermetically sealed within the flexible film.

53. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the flexible film comprises polypropylene having an ethylene vinyl alcohol oxygen barrier layer and one or more sealant layers comprising polypropylene, polyethylene and polybutylene.

54. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the flexible film comprises polypropylene and a glycerol monostearate release agent.

55. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the wrapped food slice has a refrigerated shelf life of greater than about three months.

56. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the wrapped food slice has a refrigerated shelf life of greater than about six months.

57. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the wrapped food slice includes food items to which food preservatives have not been added, and has a refrigerated shelf life of greater than about six months.

58. (withdrawn) The wrapped food slice of Claim 44, wherein the hardness of the nut butter within the finished food slice is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm^2 at 43°F.

59. (withdrawn) The food slice of Claim 44, wherein the hardness of the jelly within the finished food slice is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm^2 at 43°F.

60. (Currently Amended) A fluid-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing composite food portions consisting of two or more different food items wrapped in a flexible film, wherein the food items maintain their individual product identity, comprising the steps of:

preparing each of the two or more different food items, the food items comprising gels;

separately delivering each of the two or more food items to an

extrusion location;

continuously coextruding the food items and combining them into a predetermined amount of the food portion using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, while permitting the ~~individual~~ food items within the composite food portion to maintain their individual product identity; ~~discrete product identities and individual organoleptic attributes; and~~

forming the tubular web into a slice-shaped food product;

briefly maintaining separation of the food items following extrusion and prior to the formation of the web into a slice-shaped food product using one or more divider plates; and

enclosing the food portion comprising the different food items which are in physical contact with each other within the flexible film and sealing each food portion within the film, wherein the food portions are cohesive and manually removeable from the film.

61.-62. (canceled)

63. (Currently Amended) A fluid-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing conformed food slices consisting of nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, comprising the steps of:

preparing the nut butter and jelly into a fluidic mixture;

delivering the fluidic mixture of the heated nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;

continuously coextruding the nut butter and jelly;

adding sugar syrup to the nut butter and to the jelly prior to the coextrusion step;

simultaneously filling the coextruded nut butter and jelly within a tubular web of the flexible film, and longitudinally sealing the film using one or more longitudinal sealing bars to form a hermetic longitudinal seal;

forming the product-filled film into a slice-shaped form before longitudinal

sealing of the film;

sealing the film at cross-sealing locations to form hermetic cross-seals; and

cooling the product-filled film either before or after cross-sealing of the film;

to thereby provide hermetically sealed food slices each of which contain the nut butter and the jelly, the food slices being wrapped and hermetically sealed within the flexible film, wherein the food items within the composite food slices maintain their individual product identity and are cohesive and manually removeable from the film.

64. (original) The process of Claim 63, wherein the food slice, while at ambient room temperatures, has sufficient cohesiveness such that it may be manually removed from its sealed wrapper while substantially retaining the textural and shape characteristics of the slice.

65 (canceled)

66. (previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the amount of the food portion present is derived by measuring the expansion or contraction of the tubular web of film depending upon the amount of food present within the film.

67. (previously presented) The process of Claim 66, wherein an electric motor controlled by a variable frequency drive is used to control the amount of food introduced into tubular web of film.

68. (previously presented) The process of Claim 67, further comprising a linear variable differential transformer, wherein motor speed changes depending upon sensed voltage, the sensed voltage fluctuating with expansions or contractions in the tubular web of film.

69. (previously presented) The process of Claim 21, wherein the sensing mechanism comprises a bubble control device for controlling the amount of food items enclosed by the flexible film.

70. (previously presented) The process of Claim 40, further comprising the step of adding corn syrup to the food items prior to the extruding step but after substantial mixing has occurred.

71. (previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the portion control method permits an adjustment in the relative amount of two or more of the food items within a food portion.

72. (previously presented) The process of Claim 14, wherein the food items are combined into a food portion using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present.

73. (previously presented) The process of Claim 72, wherein portion control method permits an adjustment in the relative amount of two or more of the food items within a food portion.

74. (previously presented) The process of Claim 73, wherein at least one of the one or more divider plates is moved to permit an adjustment in the relative amount of two or more of the food items within a food portion.

75. (previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of cooling and then flattening the product-filled film.

76. (previously presented) The process of Claim 75, wherein the cooling and flattening steps occur after the food items are enclosed within the tubular web of film.

77. (previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the cooling step is accomplished using cooling water.

78. (currently amended) The ~~fluid fill~~ process of Claim 40, wherein the sugar syrup comprises corn syrup.

79. (previously presented) The fluid fill process of Claim 63, wherein the sugar syrup comprises corn syrup.

80. (new) The process of Claim 40, wherein gum is used to enhance gel formation

81. (new) The process of Claim 80, wherein sugar is used to disperse the gum.

82. (new) The process of Claim 81, wherein the sugar comprises sugar syrup.